

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1223
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3697

BRUSSELS FOR USEEC/LABATT

PARIS FOR LABATT

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, TS
SUBJ: HABIB ACHOUR: LETTERS FROM PRISON

1. SUMMARY. IMPRISONED FORMER UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL
RECENTLY SUBMITTED LETTERS TO PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA AND TO
THE PSD ARABIC LANGUAGE NEWSPAPER AL AMAL, THROUGH THE
JUDICIAL OFFICE IN CHARGE OF PRISONER COMMUNICATIONS.
FAMILY SOURCE SHOWED EMBOFF HANDWRITTEN COPIES -- FOUR
AND TWENTY-SIX PAGES RESPECTIVELY -- WHICH SOURCE HAD
CARRIED OUT OF PRISON SURREPTITIOUSLY DURING A SCHEDULED
VISIT. THE LETTER TO BOURGUIBA COMPLAINED OF ARREST
PROCEDURES, ALLEGED DISTORTIONS OF RECENT HISTORY, AND
ALLUDED TO TRIAL STRATEGIES HE WOULD NOT REPEAT NOT

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EMPLOY. THE LETTER TO AL-AMAL CORRECTED SUPPOSED
DISTORTIONS OF HIS UNION CAREER AS DESCRIBED RECENTLY IN
EXTRACTS OF THE "WHITE PAPER", THE PSD'S OFFICIAL VERSION
OF THE CONTEXT AND CAUSES OF THE JANUARY 26 GENERAL STRIKE
AND SOCIAL DISCORDERS. END SUMMARY.

2. A PARAPHRASE OF THE FRENCH-LANGUAGE MANUSCRIPT, DATED

MARCH 18, 1978, FOLLOWS:

--MR. PRESIDENT,

--I HAVE THE HONOR TO INFORM YOU OF THE FOLLOWING: YOU DOUBTLESS ARE AWARE OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING MY ARREST BEFORE WHICH MY PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY WAS LIFTED IN ABSENTIA. EVEN THOUGH MY ARREST WAS BASED ON FLAGRANTE DELICTI, THIS WAS NOT EVEN DISCUSSED IN THE JUDGES LATER INQUIRY. THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, IN ITS FEAR OF HEARING THE REALITY OF THE CURRENT SOCIAL SITUATION IN OPEN ASSEMBLY, STRIPPED AWAY MY IMMUNITY WITHOUT GIVING ME THE COURTESY OR OPPORTUNITY OF DEFENSE.

--TEN DAYS AGO I SENT A REBUTTAL TO AL AMAL'S REPRINT OF THE WHITE PAPER, BUT IT HAS NOT YET BEEN PUBLISHED. THESE ARTICLES DISTORTED MY OWN PAST AS WELL AS PART OF THE HISTORY WHICH YOUR AND I LIVED THROUGH TOGETHER AND WHICH MARKED THE RECENT HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE (DISORDERS OF) JANUARY 26 LIES WITH SAYAH, BEN AICHA JERAD, AND HABIB FATALLAH ON THE PSD SIDE, AS I HAVE TOLD NOUIRA. DR. HANNABLIA AND THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SURETE NATIONALE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE. WHEN I GO TO TRIAL I WILL ASK MY LAWYERS TO AVOID DISCUSSION MY PAST, WHICH IS GLORIOUS, AND NOT TO AROUSE THE PATRIOTISM OF THE JUDGES IN ORDER TO INFLUENCE THEM.
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ANY FULL AND FAIR INVESTIGATION WILL REVEAL THAT I NEVER DID ANYTHING NOR TOOK A POSITION CONTRARY TO THE INTEREST OF MY BELOVED COUNTRY. WITH ASSURANCES OF PROFOUND RESPECT,
SIGNED HABIB ACHOUR.

3.SUMMARY OF ACHOUR REBUTTAL LETTER TO AL-AMAL FOLLOWS:
ACHOUR ACCUSED THE EDITOR OF PRINTING "WORSE THAN LIES" AND DEMANDED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CORRECT THE RECORD. HE HAD "ALWAYS FAVORED" A MULTI-PARTY, MULTI-UNION SITUATION. (SIC) HE USED AS AN EXAMPLE HIS "ENDORSEMENT" OF BEN SAAD WHO WAS REQUESTED BY THE PARTY TO FORM A PARALLEL UNION (FORCE OUVRIERE TUNISIENNE) IN 1977. HE RECALLED HIS INTENSE ACTIVITIES IN SETTING UP WORKER COOPERATIVES DURING 1964/65. HE SAID THE PSD --DURING ITS CONGRESS AT BIZERTE THAT YEAR AND FEARING THE GROWING POWER OF UGTT -- VOTED THAT ALL NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING UGTT) MUST JOIN THE PARTY. MOHAMED SAYAH, PRESENT PSD DIRECTOR, WAS ALSO PARTY DIRECTOR AT THAT TIME. THE RIVALRY BETWEEN UGTT AND PSD CULMINATED IN THE "FERRY BOAT INCIDENT" IN WHICH ACHOUR SAID HE WAS FRAMED AND UNJUSTLY IMPRISONED. MOVING TO THE PERIOD OF 1976-77, HE REITERATED HIS ROLE IN THE TUNISIA/LIBYA CONTINENTAL SHELF DISPUTE IN WHICH HE HAD WORKED

"HAND IN GLOVE" WITH GOVERNMENT. IN 1977, HE SAID DISCUSSIONS OF NATIONAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS BETWEEN UGTT AND GOT INTENSIFIED, AS DID THE AMBITIONS OF SAYAH (SIC). DURING THAT YEAR, PDG'S (MANAGERS OF STATE-CONTROLLED COMPANIES) WERE STRIPPED OF THEIR NEGOTIATING POWER TO DISCUSS ECONOMIC ISSUES WITH THE UNION. IN HIS VERSION OF THE "FAMOUS PHONE CALL" OF JANUARY 26, ACHOUR SAID THAT HE HAD CALLED SURETE NATIONALE TO EXPRESS CONCERN FOR THE DETERIORATING HEALTH OF KHAIREDDINE SALHI. NO ONE IN AUTHORITY WAS PRESENT AT HEADQUARTERS AT THAT MOMENT AND HE LEFT HIS MESSAGE WITH A TELEPHONE OPERATOR. HE SAID THAT THE "FIRE AND BLOOD WARNING" WAS PURE FABRICATION. HE FINALLY COMPLAINED THAT THE PARTY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HIS PRESENCE IN JAIL TO WRITE A NOVEL WHICH DISTORTED HISTORY.

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4. COMMENT. ACHOUR FAMILY SOURCE HAS TOLD US THAT EX-UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL DID NOT EXPECT EITHER OF TWO LETTERS TO REACH ADDRESSEES. PURPOSE OF LETTERS MAY HAVE BEEN TO PUT HIS VIEWS ON RECORD, BOTH IN LATER PUBLIC DISPLAY DURING TRIAL AND FOR MORE IMMEDIATE CLANDESTINE CIRCULATION. OBVIOUSLY ACHOUR'S VERSION OF HISTORY IS AS ONE-SIDED AS THE WHITE BOOK'S OFFICIAL EXPLANATION OF JANUARY 26 AND EVENTS LEADING UP TO IT. WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY REPORTED THAT THE WHITE BOOK APPEARED TO BE BRIEF OF GOVERNMENT CASE AGAINST ACHOUR; THESE TWO LETTERS NOW APPEAR TO BE OUTLINE OF ACHOUR'S DEFENSE. ACHOUR WILL NOT DOUBT ATTEMPT TO DOWNPLAY ANY PERSONAL AMBITIONS AND TO EMPHASIZE HIS PAST AND PRESENT PATRIOTISM. IMPACT OF ACHOUR'S CHARGES, BECAUSE OF THEIR NEWNESS, COULD BE VERY DRAMATIC. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT HE SEEMS TO ACCUSE SAYAH AS MAIN CULPRIT, AND PARTY DIRECTOR COULD END UP BEING "ON TRIAL" AS MUCH AS ACHOUR.

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